

## **Northwest 23**

### *Chapter 23*

Why are you sulking again?

You have no idea how much work went into this encryption method.

According to the rumours, it was quite a feat when the first code arrived. But the code system isn't the only famous thing known about the Admiral, there are so many more shocking stories about him.

When I was a lieutenant, I stayed up for ten days trying to decrypt his code before setting sail. Even if it took us days, we were still proud of cracking that geeks code. However, the last line was, If its not solved by June 10, destroy this letter. By then, June 20 had already passed, so naturally, I threw it away.

A second letter came. The entire fleet felt victorious for deciphering it much faster. But the letter ended with a note, saying If its almost July and the decryption isn't completed yet, discard this letter. That day was June 30<sup>th</sup>, so again, we discarded the letter.

The third letter arrived. We specifically started with decoding the first and last lines. The message was completed with a short Don't cheat. I solved the code without any trouble as that last letter didn't specify any deadlines. At first, the entire crew rejoiced in unison, till we read the second to last row, Why are you so late? Can't you depart any sooner?. We worked all night to prepare for departure, only to see Sir Edgar arriving the very day.

A smile appeared on the captain's face.

What? He came back?

That's right, Captain. He ordered that we sail back to Mondovi immediately. Sir Nicola was the vice-admiral at the time and declared that he would stop the Admiral from going back no matter what, even if that meant giving up his title. But the day, Sir Edgar disappeared again. As a result, Sir Nicola was honourably discharged.

Honourably discharged? Was he injured?

Not physically, His Majesty declared him mentally scarred. A mental injury. It was the first time that ever happened, however, it wasn't particularly unexpected. The Vice-Admiral attempted to kill the Admiral, so I think His Majesty made the right choice there.

Does the Admiral disappear just for fun?

No. He must have his reasons. Maybe he was tracking a certain organisation or something.

Are you sure you believe that?

Captain.

Yes?

You talk too much. Now, get up.

Feeling the need to apologise, the captain stood up and bowed his head.

Anyway, the Admiral has never been wrong.

Delighted, the captain returned his bright expression. He walked to the first bookshelf, looking for the ninth book from the second compartment.

What, he memorised everything? I guess he isn't called a genius for nothing.

I wish he spends that great head of his on something else.

Which book did we use last time? The title was too complicated to remember.

Could it be Lastrels Analysis of the World System?

Yes. Where is it Oh. Is this it?

The captain pulled out a red hardcover. Sitting face to face, the two began deciphering the code. The admirals mail was classified as confidential, so it was customary that only a minimum number of people participated in the decryption. No matter how trivial or how dizzying the amount of numbers was.

*I never understood why I have to do this alone.*

Even though he could hear the constant swearing between the numbers, the captain had great respect for his commodore. But the longer the deciphering went on, the more enraged Sagastar became.

Captain, page 143 Its the second word on the 17<sup>th</sup> line.

Im excited

Page 88, third, on 11<sup>th</sup>.

Probably

203, 9, 5.

I

As time went on and the content of the letter became visible, it became more and more challenging to continue.

[ Send the Visha west-southwest. Sail the Sea of Ingres, off the western continent, towards Castiglione Archipelago and Santillana for now. I dont know the exact coordinates yet. Ill send another pigeon when the Visha reaches Carducho. As his majesty ordered, send the Grignard to Amiaeng, not to me. It will only get in my way. If you get bored, you can go after the pirates or something. Do as you please but keep Sagastar away from me. His nags are exhausting. Youll receive another letter with further details soon. Theres a ship Im planning on boarding in two days. Im excited. Probably ]

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His face was obscured by the early evening sky. His green eyes blended into the shallow darkness, like a sea of green. With every breeze, his hair became scattered by the wind, before huddling on his brows again.

The Captain hates me for no reason.

Lil stared at Ed, who had dared to block her path.

It was quiet. The water was calm and so was the ship. Nobody on the upper deck was interested in the conversation between the captain and the doctor.

She sneered.

*Hes been on my Bell Rock for days. We have never met because Ive been ignoring his I want to talk stares. So now, he was waiting for me to come here on my own.*

Its because you smell fishy.

What? Where?

When she saw him raise his arm to sniff it, she tried to walk away. But Ed was determined and stopped her again.

If you dont like me because of my smell, Ill take more baths.

I mean youre suspicious. Now get out of my way.

But why?

I dont know, just move it, youre pissing me off.

Finally, Lil cited a vicious threat. She passed by as Ed dropped his shoulders with a glum expression. She thought hed leave her alone, but instead he followed her.

Are you going to keep being like this each time we meet? If anything seems suspicious, you can ask me. Ill tell you everything.

Lil kept walking with a grump expression, but unwillingly asked a question.

What did you do in Amiaeng?

I was looking for a suitable pirate ship to board.

When did you arrive?

Early May?

From then on, tell me everything youve done.

What?

Lil turned around and raised her chin.

What? You dont want to? Never mind then.

Oh, no!

Speak.

Lil folded her arms, ready to hear him out. His wide-open, green eyes seemed to hesitate at first, but eventually, he stepped in front of her. Lil had now a clear view of his pale face.

*If he didnt finish his training at the clairaut yet, he should be about 21 or 22. How can an amateur like him try his luck with me? Should I kick him in the balls?*

Subconsciously, Lil gave strength to her knee.

You know, I thought the Southern League of Pirates was the best place for me to hide from the Navy. The other islands in the South are a little scary because theyre unfamiliar to me, and Amiaeng is famous for its independence from the Empire, right? Also, as soon as I left my hometown, I travelled to and from Amiaeng quite a few times I left without a penny, so for a while I had to beg to stay alive

Why? If youre a doctor, shouldnt you have some money?

It wasnt that simple. Do you think its easy to live on your own in the middle of a pirates den?

And?

Then I heard about the Counts troubles.

What?

Well, he was having problems with that precious thing that men like you and I have.

It took a while before Lil understood what he was referring to.

Oh.

The Count has a promiscuous sex life, so its very hm. Anyway, hes been seeing all sorts of doctors. When I said I was a doctor from the mainland, he reacted very pleased. So, I stayed around and at the same time learned more about Amiaeng. I think, for about a month? When his symptoms improved, the Count gave me a room in his mansion. But I was unable to live there comfortably as I was still on the run for the Navy, feeling the need to move around.

Without realising it, Lil raised her eyebrows. The more and more sentences were added to his story, the more her stern face loosened.

*All his stories make sense. Theyre indisputable. If it hadnt been for our meeting that started with me as a prostitute and him with his fake eyepatch and beard, a script as elaborate as this couldnt have come out. And even if I assume hes lying, that will mean that hes seeing two people of different sexes as the same person, does that even make sense?*